Book Review

From Conflict to Inclusion in Housing: Interaction of Communities, Residents and Activists

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From Conflict to Inclusion in Housing: Interaction of Communities, Residents, and Activists presents a fascinating – if highly eclectic – collection of 12 articles about the contested geographies of dwelling in different parts of the world. Most of the interventions focus on the Global North, but there is a chapter on Brazil, one on Indonesia, and one on Vietnam. The contributions were written by educators, design and architecture practitioners, and academics (commendably, a number of them are doctoral students or postdoctoral fellows) who specialize in the fields of planning, architecture, design, sociology, human geography, public policy, and the arts. In the brief introductory chapter as well as in an absorbing Editorial Commentary, the editors seek to craft a sense of coherence around the book's wide-ranging set of topics by describing the volume as both a compilation of diverse perspectives on "the role of communities in project developments" (p. 1) – where project developments refers broadly to "successful and failed housing initiatives" (p. 2) – and a multi-disciplinary examination of "the causes and results of the production, occupation and adaptation of housing estates and residential blocks from the users' point of view" (p.19). However, the book productively touches on much more than these two broad themes. In fact, not all the chapters deal strictly with the development of housing estates or residential blocks, and despite the collection's title, not all chapters are

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directly oriented to the examination of notions of conflict and inclusion or the analysis of interactions between communities, residents, and activists.

In the first section of the book, titled "Socially engaged practices of housing and contested environments (participatory practices and negotiation policies/sharing and relation with place)", Jerome Stevens examines the organized squatting of abandoned buildings in downtown São Paulo, with particular attention to the famed occupation of Hotel Cambridge; Jo Richardson discusses the tribulations of managing and planning for Gypsy and Traveller sites in the UK; and Yenny Rahmayati focuses on the short-comings of large-scale housing reconstruction efforts in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following the tsunami disaster of 2004. In the second section, titled "Spatial politics of housing (affordable housing, self-build, re-building and the economics/policies of housing)", Sandra Karina Löschke and Hazel Easthope review cases of adaptive redesign and participatory approaches to transforming aging housing in the cities of Sydney, Toronto, Ommoord (in the Netherlands), and Paris; May East provides an account of three different approaches to the regeneration of abandoned towns in Southern Italy; Johanna Brugman examines the use of community-oriented housing micro-finance in the Vietnamese city of Vinh; and Kane Pham focuses on brownfield residential development geared to the private market in Sydney, critiquing the ways in which it ignores the dire need for affordable housing in the city. In the final section of the book, titled "Non-standard practices of housing (art practice and alternative forms of engagement with housing)", Keely Macarow discusses examples of housing providers, architects and artists combining their respective expertise to develop housing in Melbourne, Stockholm, and Houston; Lee Azus provides an analysis of Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead* art installation, which consists of "a full-scale sculptural replica of the artist's childhood home in [suburban] Detroit" (p. 149); Michael Darcy and Dallas Rogers examine how stigmatized public housing residents "speak back" (p. 171) to common stereotypes in Sydney; Jonathan Orlek discusses how a series of artistic performances in New York, Vienna, Manchester, and Sheffield help re-imagine alternative ways of inhabiting domestic space; and Matthew Thompson looks at the issue of dilapidated housing rehabilitation in Liverpool, focusing in particular on the role of community land trusts and the local co-op movement.

In my opinion, the book's main strength derives from its extensive reach in terms of the variety of sites, topics, processes and types of agents with which it engages. Ironically, this wide scope could also be seen as the collection's principal weakness. While *From Conflict to Inclusion in Housing* provides an enthralling wealth of diverse material to learn from, its multifaceted contents do not lend themselves to the elaboration of a synthetic understanding of dwelling and power relations in the contemporary global context. To its main intended audience of socially conscious architecture and design scholars, the book certainly delivers the expansive thematic field that the editors promise. Readers of this journal may however be left pining for a tighter set of

interventions that investigate housing-related struggles in a more systematic fashion and approach much more critically the goal of inclusion as a response to structural social conflict. That being said, I must add that any reader wishing to learn about the present-day complexity of the politics of dwelling will encounter in this rich volume an excellent opportunity to appreciate the wide range of contexts and formats in which these politics manifest themselves around the world today.

It is worth noting in closing that the book was published by UCL Press in Open Access format, which enables readers to download a PDF copy free of cost. This choice of publishing format is highly appropriate and laudable, and will no doubt be appreciated by English-speaking housing activists and community organizations wishing to learn about the politics of dwelling in locations other than their own.